



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 5TH MARCH 2020

Annual Report of ASYE Academy Evaluation

Report of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

Report prepared by Catharina Simpson, Team Manager, ASYE Academy

Purpose of report

To present an evaluation of the ASYE Academy since its development in 2018.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. To note the contents of the report.
2. To identify any issues for further scrutiny.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the Living and Learning priority in the Corporate Plan.

Key issues

1. The ASYE academy was set up in order to help alleviate challenges with recruitment and retention of social workers and provide newly qualified social workers with a robust and nurturing introduction to social work practice.
2. Retention of social workers who have been supported in the academy is good. Only one social worker has left the Local Authority since August 2018 after completing her ASYE. She is still working in social care but is currently not pursuing a job as a social worker.
3. Sickness absence has been low, and no absences have related to work related stress. Overall sickness in Children's Social Care on September 19 was 4.83 % but the ASYE academy was 0.43%. Sickness absence relating to stress is a significant challenge within children's social care nationally and it was one of the fundamental

principles of the academy that staff need to be nurtured and well supported in their first year of employment to prevent stress leading to sickness and absence from work.

4. Service users have provided feedback about the services that they have received, and these comments have been included in the portfolios of the social workers. The feedback has been particularly positive about the respectful way they are approached.
5. Complaints have been minimal, and none have required a formal escalation through the complaints procedures. Any complaints received were dealt with by the Manager.
6. The academy provides social workers to the service areas where the need is the highest. Cohort 1 provided workers for the locality teams in South East and Central however Cohort 2 and 3 are now also providing staff for the Front Door and 14+ team.
7. Cohort 1 has finalised their year and submitted their portfolios within the 12 month time scale. There has been no delay in the workers completing their portfolios and no delay is anticipated for cohort 2.

Background

The Academy opened their doors in August 2018 for a cohort of 8 newly qualified social workers approximately 18 months after the idea was first discussed and subsequently developed by the senior management team.

The aim of the academy model was;

“To offer Newly Qualified Social Workers the support to make the transition from academic study to the world of work, nurturing them through their ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) to become capable practitioners with the ability to critically analyse and evaluate their practice and always keep the child at the heart of everything that they do.”

In addition, The Children’s Social Care and Improvement Plan for Northumberland at the time of setting up the academy identifies several priorities related to the development of the Academy.

Priority 2 - Improve and promote frontline social work practice in relation to key assessment processes and statutory safeguarding procedures.

Priority 3 - To raise the standard of practice around key areas of social work linked to planning for children and ensure timely progression of plans for children leading to assessed needs being met.

Priority 6 - To promote a positive culture to ensure that all staff work with the right environment, enabling them to flourish and thrive in the workplace.

Priority 9 - Recruit, retain and develop a professional committed and stable workforce.

The Academy is based in Eddie Ferguson House, Blyth located in the same team room as the South East locality teams. The Academy team has their own workstation. This is important because we use the group pod as a learning tool, and it supports a strong learning culture.

We have 2 intakes of 8 workers in September and March of each year

The team of 8 newly qualified social workers all start together and have a 2 week induction aimed at getting to know their workplace, the council, each other and to formally start their year.

The feedback from workers is that they enjoy the fact that they are all at the same starting point. Through Dissertation Day, where the workers do a small presentation about their chosen subject during their degree, they also discover the expertise that each worker brings to the academy.

During the first 6 months the cohort participates in formal training offered by the NSCC (Northumberland Safeguarding Children Committee) and the training department. In addition, they have weekly team meetings with guest speakers, bespoke training delivered by the management team for the cohort and the opportunity to do group supervision.

The workers are allocated cases as soon as they officially enter the Academy.

Their caseload is slowly built up and the choice of cases is made to provide experience in a wide variety of issues (substance misuse, mental health, neglect, domestic abuse), age range of children, type of cases (Child in Need/Looked After Children/ Child Protection) and range of assessment work. The complexity of the work develops over time

All of the workers have caseloads that build gradually and do not exceed 15 cases whilst they remain in the Academy.

In all 3 cohorts, there have been incidents where the case work complexity has escalated however the workers involved felt so well supported that they wanted to continue with the case even if that included initiating legal proceedings and presenting cases to court. In all cases they were provided with the appropriate support and oversight to manage the cases and the process. This of course means there is continuity for the children and young people in these cases which is good practice and supports our values of providing child centred practice in Northumberland.

The performance information provided in tableau indicates very strong compliance practice from the workers in relation to visits, reviews and supervision timeliness.

After six months in the academy the practitioners move to the locality teams where they will finalise their first year. The Academy manager and deputy manager continue to support with the completion of their portfolio and gate keep their caseload to avoid feelings of being overwhelmed as well as providing reflective supervision.

Pillars of the Academy

Reflection

“There is evidence that social workers whose reflective abilities are more highly developed tend to be happier. Our own research has shown that reflection is an important self-protective mechanism for social workers, as those who are better able to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and beliefs, who are able to consider the position of other people, and who can use their reflective abilities to communicate effectively with others were more resilient to stress and more mentally and physically”

(CC Inform-developing emotional resilience and wellbeing in practitioners)

This process of developing reflective abilities is supported by the academy manager and deputy manager in the formal setting (individual and group supervision) but also and perhaps more crucially through ongoing informal conversations while sitting at the team workstation. Workers can listen in on case discussions with the manager, provide peer support by talking about their cases. This is especially important to help to contain anxiety which at the beginning of social workers careers is high due to the lack of experience. The managers model this supportive approach and create a learning climate. It will help to develop emotional resilience which will support wellbeing for practitioners in the future and possibly lower the sickness rate.

The aims of the academy are linked to the priorities within the children’s social care improvement plan.

Priority 6 - Promote a positive culture to ensure that all staff work with the right environment, enabling them to flourish and thrive in the workplace.

Priority 9 - Recruit, retain and develop a professional committed and stable workforce.

Signs of Safety Practice Model (SOS)

The Academy has fully embraced the ethos of the SOS model which is instilling strong values into our practitioners to work with families, to look at their strengths and engage with the family network. In the first 6 months this becomes part of their social work identity and will help to implement the model in the wider teams once they make the transfer. This is in line with the implementation of the SOS practice model in Northumberland and the priority 2 and 3 of the improvement plan.

Priority 2 - Improve and promote frontline social work practice in relation to key assessment processes and statutory safeguarding procedures.

Priority 3 - To raise the standard of practice around key areas of social work linked to planning for children and ensure timely progression of plans for children leading to assessed needs being met.

Embracing new ideas/encouraging creative solutions

The management team is developing new ways of working and are encouraged to be creative by the senior management team. In practice it means that we have developed templates aligned with the SOS practice model but also recognised the expertise of the workers who are starting their year. The Dissertation Day is a good example of that.

Cohort 3 has had the opportunity to try out a tool bag for direct work with children. The tool bag contains arts and craft materials, laminated cards with the SOS tools, questionnaires, worry monster etc. The workers leave the bag in their car ready to be used at any time they need it. This promotes child focused practice and increases the workers skills in their direct work (Priority 3) The tool bag was developed with workers from cohort 1 and the training department. We have evaluated the effectiveness of the materials and are further updating the bag.

Learning culture

As an organisation it is important to embrace learning to improve practice. The academy is fully aware of the importance of a positive learning climate. Workers are made to feel safe and encouraged to ask as many questions as needed to enable them to gain confidence and develop their practice. Their questions also mean learning for the management team and ensure that we reflect on our practice.

We are fully embracing ongoing feedback and are actively seeking this.

A 360 feedback tool has been used to gather the views of the cohort, line managers and supervisors. Using a score from 1-5. The survey was sent out to 21 practitioners and 19 responses were returned.

The survey shows consistent high scores for the support and good quality supervision the NQSW are receiving however it also identifies that the transition to the locality teams is more difficult and is something to refine and improve.

In addition, there is also a positive view about the involvement and endorsement of the senior management team which scored 4 and above by all participants.

Developing resilience and learning from feedback

In response to the feedback received that the transition to the locality teams can be difficult we are developing a buddy system by using the previous cohort to support the workers who are joining their team to help the new workers adjust to the more pressured environment of a safeguarding team. The Academy managers have also developed good working relationships with the managers of the receiving teams so we can identify at the earliest moment possible if a worker is feeling overwhelmed and needs some extra support to work through a difficult patch.

Conclusions

We continue to develop the processes and the learning offered in the Academy.

We are engaging regularly in feedback sessions with the newly qualified workers as well as their team managers and are able to respond to gaps in practice if identified.

This is in close cooperation with the principal social worker, the training department and head of service. It is too early to reach definite conclusions about retention and this is part of a wider strategy however only one practitioner has left to date.

As the Academy team manager, I believe that we provide well-grounded practitioners who have strong values about child focused practice and working respectfully with families looking for the strengths implementing the SOS practice model. The feedback from parents and young people and professionals is encouraging in this respect, further evidenced by the limited complaints received.

We are laying the foundations for practitioners to improve practice in assessments work and statutory safeguarding procedures and make the planning for children and their families timely so their assessed needs are met through the wealth of training and reflection practitioners can access (Priority 2,3).

Most importantly at the end of their year the practitioners have built emotional resilience which will help them to stay healthy and able to cope with the emotional demands of the job which is supported by the low levels of sickness to date.

Implications

Policy	Supports workforce strategy
Finance and value for money	Reduces agency staff costs and supports recruitment
Legal	Fulfils statutory duties to provide services
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	Supports workforce strategy
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	Supports practice improvements and development to offer best services to users
Carbon reduction	N/A
Wards	County wide

Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	N/A
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Wayne Daley

Author and Contact Details

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